

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01

SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 DOE-11

SOE-02 DOEE-00 TRSE-00 CU-04 /082 W

-----108842 032253Z /72-65

O R 032205Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9408

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, GT

SUBJ: GOVERNMENT WORKERS STRIKE WINDS DOWN; ELECTION STILL
SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 5

REF: GUATEMALA 1283 AND 1228

1. ALTHOUGH NOT YET OUT OF THE WOODS, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE OVERCOME A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO THE ELECTIONS. ON MARCH 2, PRESIDENT LAUGERUD SENT CONGRESS A BUDGET AMENDMENT REQUEST NEEDED TO GRANT PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS A PAY INCREASE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REPORTED THAT EIGHTY PERCENT OF WORKERS HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR JOBS. POST AND TELEGRAPH EMPLOYEES RETURNED TO WORK ON A TEMPORARY BASIS PENDING THE OUTCOME OF TALKS BETWEEN PRESIDENT LAUGERUD AND LEADERS OF THE GOVERNMENT WORKERS COMMITTEE (CETE) SCHEDULED FOR 10 AM MARCH 3. CONGRESS MET SAME DAY AND APPROVED THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST. THIS AUTHORIZES THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO TRANSFER UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT OF FUNDS

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FROM THE CAPITAL BUDGET ACCOUNT TO THE CURRENT ACCOUNT. THE PRESIDENT NOW HAS LATITUDE IN HIS TALKS WITH CETE TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE PAY SCHEDULE WITHIN THE AMOUNT CONGRESS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED FOR THE BUDGET.

2. IT SEEMS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD. STILL THERE IS CONSIDERABLE LABOR UNREST. RAILROAD WORKERS

HAVE JOINED THE GOVERNMENT WORKERS STRIKE AND INDE WORKERS ARE STILL CONSIDERING THIS POSSIBILITY. ELECTRIC COMPANY WORKERS ARE CONSIDERING JOINING THE STRIKE OF ESMALTES Y ACEROS WORKERS WHO BELONG TO THE SAME FEDERATION (FTG). ESMALTES WORKERS HAVE BEEN ON A HUNGER STRIKE IN FRONT OF THE NATIONAL PALACE FOR OVER A WEEK. THE COMPANY TEMPORARILY LAID OFF A NUMBER OF WORKERS EARLY LAST YEAR ON THE GROUNDS THAT AN OVEN HAD TO BE REPAIRED. MINISTRY OF LABOR OFFICIALS HAVE PROPOSED WORKERS ACCEPT A LUMP SUM SEPARATION PAYMENT AND QUIT ALL CLAIMS AGAINST THE COMPANY. THE OFFER HAS NOT BEEN ACCEPTED. MEANWHILE WORKERS CHARGE POLICE BRUTALITY AND BEATINGS. ACCORDING TO POLICE, THE WORKERS WERE CAMPING IN THE ENTRANCE TO THE NATIONAL PALACE AS WELL AS IN OFFICIAL VEHICLES. WORKERS HAVE ALSO DRAPED THEIR PROTEST BANNERS AROUND THE COLUMNS OF THE PALACE. ACCORDING TO ESMALTES' WORKERS, ELECTRIC COMPANY WORKERS HAVE PROMISED TO STRIKE SUNDAY, MARCH 5 (ELECTION DAY) CUTTING OFF ALL POWER IN THE CAPITAL, UNLESS THEIR PROBLEM IS SOLVED BY THEN.

3. THE CNUS ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATION MARCH 2 WAS LARGE (ESTIMATES VARY BETWEEN 10,000 AND 20,000), ORDERLY, AND WITHOUT INCIDENT. BAKERY WORKERS CONTINUE ON STRIKE FOR HIGHER PAY. SOME HOSPITAL DOCTORS (E.G. INTERNS) HAVE JOINED THE GOVERNMENT WORKERS STRIKE IN SYMPATHY; EMERGENCY CASES ARE BEING TREATED.

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4. PRESIDENT LAUGERUD HAS SHOWN CONSIDERABLE RESTRAINT AND FLEXIBILITY. ALTHOUGH MANY WORKERS ARE STILL OUT, HE DECIDED TO GO AHEAD AND RECONVENE CONGRESS TO GET THE NEEDED BUDGET AUTHORIZATION. CETE LEADERS LIKEWISE HAVE SHOWN FLEXIBILITY, AUTHORIZING POST AND TELEGRAPH WORKERS TO RETURN TO WORK AS A STEP TOWARD GETTING THE DESIRED INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT. THESE ARE GOOD SIGNS, BUT NO GUARANTEE THAT THE SITUATION COULD NOT COME APART AT THE LAST MINUTE. SOME GROUPS, SUCH AS THE TEACHERS, FLATLY OPPOSED THE PRESIDENT'S PAY OFFER. AN INDE AND ELECTRIC COMPANY WORKERS STRIKE (THE LATTER UNRELATED TO THE GOVERNMENT WORKERS STRIKE), COULD AGAIN RAISE DOUBTS ABOUT ELECTION. ANDREWS

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